CLAIMS

[c1] 1. A method in a computer system for communication related to an outsourced task assigned to a vendor by an enterprise, comprising:

receiving at least one enterprise user input through a user interface to create an outsourced task, wherein the enterprise user input comprises a definition of the outsourced task and an identification of the vendor;

presenting an enterprise user with at least one checklist to be completed, wherein the at least one checklist refers to predefined restrictions;

receiving an enterprise user input that completes the at least one checklist;

evaluating the complete checklist for compliance with the predefined restrictions;

when the checklist is determined to comply with the predefined restrictions, setting a status of the outsourced task to "initiated";

receiving at least one vendor input through the user interface, wherein the at least one vendor input comprises an indication of at least one vendor action related to completing the outsourced task;

setting a status of the task to indicate a current point in a predefined outsourced task lifecycle; and

storing data related to the outsourced task lifecycle in a vendor application database, including the enterprise inputs and the vendor inputs.

[c2] 2. The method of 1, further comprising:

periodically searching a legacy database for legacy data related to outsourced tasks, wherein the information was entered using a legacy method; and

incorporating the legacy data into the vendor application database according to respective related outsourced tasks.

[c3] 3. The method of 1, further comprising:

receiving an enterprise user input that comprises an assignment of the outsourced task to a vendor drafter/engineer; and

setting the status of the task to "assigned".

[c4] 4. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving a vendor input that comprises a request for additional information related to the outsourced task; and

setting the status of the task to "information requested".

[c5] 5. The method of claim 4, further comprising:

receiving an enterprise input comprising the additional information; and

setting the status of the task to "information sent".

[c6] 6. The method of claim 5, wherein the request for additional information and the additional information each include documents in at least one format selected from a group comprising, DOC, TXT, XLS, GIF, PDF and TIFF.

[c7] 7. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving vendor input comprising an indication that a vendor drafter/engineer has begun the outsourced task; and

setting the status of the task to "in progress".

[c8] 8. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving vendor input comprising an indication that the outsourced task cannot be completed by a predefined date; and

setting the status of the task to "delivery in danger".

[c9] 9. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving vendor input comprising an indication that the outsourced task is completed; and

setting the status of the task to "activity submitted".

[c10] 10. The method of claim 9, further comprising:

receiving enterprise input comprising an indication that the outsourced task has been reviewed and is not satisfactory, including a specification of rework to be performed; and

setting the status of the task to "rework required".

[c11] 11. The method of claim 10, further comprising:

receiving vendor input comprising an indication that the specified rework has been undertaken; and

setting the status of the task to "rework initiated".

[c12] 12. The method of claim 9, further comprising:

receiving enterprise input comprising an indication that the outsourced task has been reviewed and an action item is required, including a specification of the action item; and

setting the status of the task to "action required".

[c13] 13. The method of claim 121, further comprising:

receiving vendor input comprising an indication that the action item has been performed; and

setting the status of the task to "action taken".

[c14] 14. The method of claim 13, further comprising:

receiving enterprise input comprising an indication that the action taken is satisfactory; and

setting the status of the task to "closed".

[c15] 15. The method of claim 9, further comprising:

receiving enterprise input comprising an indication that the outsourced task has been reviewed, including feedback to the vendor related to the outsourced task; and

setting the status of the task to "feedback sent".

[c16] 16. The method of claim 13, further comprising:

receiving enterprise input comprising an indication that the outsourced task has been reviewed and is not satisfactory, including a specification of rework to be performed; and

setting the status of the task to "rework required".

[c17] 17. A. method in a network for communication related to a task outsourced to a vendor by an enterprise, comprising:

presenting a user interface to different enterprise actors depending on an enterprise actor's level of privilege;

presenting at least one form to the enterprise actor to facilitate collection of specific data related to the task, wherein the specific data includes, a vendor to perform the task, a completion date of the task, import and export restrictions applicable to the task, feedback to the vendor regarding vendor performance, a specific action to be performed, whether the task performed by the vendor is satisfactory, and whether the task is complete;

presenting the user interface to different vendor actors depending on a vendor actor's level of privilege;

presenting at least one form to the vendor actor to facilitate collection of specific data related to the task, wherein the specific data includes,

the vendor has assigned the task to a vendor actor;

the vendor requires more information;

a delivery of the task is in danger due to specific circumstances;

and a specific required action has been taken;

setting a status of the task dependent upon the data collected; and

storing all of the data related to the task.

[c18] 18. The method of claim 17, further comprising:

receiving input from the vendor actor regarding completion of the outsourced task;

receiving input from the enterprise actor regarding the outsourced task; and

setting a status of the task depending on the input received from the vendor actor and the enterprise actor.

[c19] 19. The method of claim 18, wherein the outsourced task is a materials resource planning ("MRP") task.

[c20] 20. The method of claim 18, wherein the vendor actor comprises a vendor drafter/engineer, and a vendor manager.

[c21] 21. The method of 20, wherein the enterprise actor comprises:

an enterprise drafting manager;

an enterprise drafter/engineer;

an enterprise general manager; and

an application administrator that administers an application that comprises the user interface.

[c22] 22. A computer-readable medium containing a vendor communication application and a data structure for defining a lifecycle of an outsourced task that is outsourced by an enterprise to a vendor, the data structure comprising:

a plurality of status definitions, wherein each of the status definitions indicates a stage in the task lifecycle;

a plurality of user definitions, wherein each of the user definitions indicates one of a group selected from,

enterprise users including enterprise managers enterprise drafter/engineers, and at least one enterprise administrator, wherein the enterprise administrator administers the vendor communication application and the data structure; and

vendor users including vendor managers and vendor drafter engineers; and

a plurality of privilege levels assigned to the plurality of users, wherein the plurality of users access the data structure using the vendor communication application to input data related to the task lifecycle.

[c23] 23. The computer-readable medium of claim 22, wherein the plurality of status definitions is set in response to input from the plurality of users.

[c24] 24. The computer-readable medium of claim 22, wherein each of the plurality of privilege levels allows one of the plurality of users to access data in the data structure that applies to a task that the one user is assigned to.

[c25] 25. The computer-readable medium of claim 24, wherein the task is outsourced by the enterprise to a particular vendor and wherein the one user of the plurality of users must be associated with at least one entity selected from a group comprising the enterprise and the particular vendor.

[c26] 26. The computer-readable medium of claim 22, wherein the data related to the task lifecycle includes:

a definition of the task;

a vendor to whom the task is outsourced;

a request for more information regarding the task; and

data documenting compliance with predetermined task restrictions, wherein the status of the lifecycle task is prevented from being set to a different status unless the task restrictions are complied with.

[c27] 27. A system for managing and documenting a lifecycle of an outsourced task that is outsourced to a vendor by an enterprise, the system comprising:

at least one server that runs a vendor communication ("VC") application, wherein a plurality of enterprise users and vendor users access the VC application input data regarding the lifecycle of the task;

at least one vendor application database that contains information regarding the task; and

at least one legacy database that contains information regarding tasks previously documented using a legacy application, wherein the VC application accesses the legacy database to automatically extract data regarding the previously documented tasks, and wherein the extracted data is integrated by the VC application into the VC database.

[c28] 28. The system of 27, further comprising an active broker that communicates with the VC application, the VC database, and the legacy database, wherein the active broker brokers objects between the VC application and the VC database and between the VC application and the legacy database.

[c29] 29. The system of 27, wherein the VC application is accessed by a plurality of users according to a user hierarchy, the user hierarchy comprising:

at least one enterprise user, wherein the at least one enterprise user is associated with at least one enterprise group and at least one enterprise unit; and

at least one vendor user, wherein the at least one vendor user is associated with at least one vendor unit.

[c30] 30. The system of claim 29, wherein the VC application manages data related to the lifecycle of the task, including:

receiving at least one enterprise user input through a user interface to create the task, wherein the enterprise user input comprises a definition of the task and an identification of the vendor;

presenting an enterprise user with at least one checklist to be completed, wherein the at least one checklist refers to predefined restrictions;

receiving an enterprise user input that completes the at least one checklist;

evaluating the complete checklist for compliance with the predefined restrictions;

when the checklist is determined to comply with the predefined restrictions, setting a status of the task to "initiated";

receiving at least one vendor input through the user interface, wherein the at least one vendor input comprises an indication of at least one vendor action related to completing the task;

setting a status of the task to indicate a current point in the lifecycle of the task; and

storing data related to the lifecycle of the task in the VC database, including the enterprise inputs and the vendor inputs.

[c31] 31. A. method in a network for communication related to a task outsourced to a vendor by an enterprise, comprising:

communicating with at least one enterprise server, comprising accessing a vendor communication application;

receiving data from the at least one enterprise server, wherein the data comprises information regarding the outsourced task and a vendor application user interface;

presenting different screens of the vendor application user interface to different vendor actors depending on a vendor actor's level of privilege;

presenting at least one form to the vendor actor to facilitate collection of specific data related to the task, wherein the specific data includes,

the vendor has assigned the task to a vendor actor;

the vendor requires more information;

a delivery of the task is in danger due to specific circumstances; and

a specific required action has been taken;

setting a status of the task dependent upon the data collected; and

sending all of the data related to the task to the at least one enterprise server.

[c32] 32. The method of claim 31, wherein the outsourced task is a materials resource planning ("MRP") task.

[c33] 33. The method of claim 32, wherein the vendor actor comprises a vendor drafter/engineer, and a vendor manager.

[c34] 34. A. method in a network for communication related to a task outsourced to a vendor by an enterprise, comprising:

presenting a user interface to different enterprise actors depending on an enterprise actor's level of privilege;

presenting at least one form to the enterprise actor to facilitate collection of specific data related to the task, wherein the specific data includes,

a vendor to perform the task, a completion date of the task, import and export restrictions applicable to the task, feedback to the vendor regarding vendor performance, a specific action to be performed, whether the task performed by the vendor is satisfactory, and whether the task is complete;

sending data to at least one vendor computer via the network, wherein the data includes the user interface;

receiving data regarding the task from the at least one vendor computer via the network, wherein the data is entered by a vendor actor at the at least one vendor computer with the user interface;

setting a status of the task dependent upon the data collected; and

storing all of the data related to the task.

[c35] 35. The method of claim 34, wherein the outsourced task is a materials resource planning ("MRP") task.

[c36] 36. The method of claim 34, wherein the vendor actor comprises a vendor drafter/engineer, and a vendor manager.

[c37] 37. The method of 34, wherein the enterprise actor comprises:

an enterprise drafting manager;

an enterprise drafter/engineer;

an enterprise general manager; and

an application administrator that administers an application that comprises the user interface.

[c38] 38. A system for managing and documenting a lifecycle of an outsourced task that is outsourced to a vendor by an enterprise, the system comprising:

at least one server means that runs a vendor communication ("VC") application, wherein a plurality of enterprise users and vendor users access the VC application input data regarding the lifecycle of the task;

at least one vendor application database means that contains information regarding the task; and

at least one legacy database means that contains information regarding tasks previously documented using a legacy application, wherein the VC application accesses the legacy database to automatically extract data regarding the previously documented tasks, and wherein the extracted data is integrated by the VC application into the VC database.

[c39] 39. The system of 38, further comprising an active broker means that communicates with the VC application, the VC database, and the legacy database, wherein the active broker means brokers objects between the VC application and the VC database and between the VC application and the legacy database.

[c40] 40. The system of 38, wherein the VC application is accessed by a plurality of users according to a user hierarchy, the user hierarchy comprising:

at least one enterprise user, wherein the at least one enterprise user is associated with at least one enterprise group and at least one enterprise unit; and

at least one vendor user, wherein the at least one vendor user is associated with at least one vendor unit.

[c41] 41. The system of claim 40, wherein the VC application manages data related to the lifecycle of the task, including:

receiving at least one enterprise user input through a user interface to create the task, wherein the enterprise user input comprises a definition of the task and an identification of the vendor;

presenting an enterprise user with at least one checklist to be completed, wherein the at least one checklist refers to predefined restrictions;

receiving an enterprise user input that completes the at least one checklist;

evaluating the complete checklist for compliance with the predefined restrictions;

when the checklist is determined to comply with the predefined restrictions, setting a status of the task to "initiated";

receiving at least one vendor input through the user interface, wherein the at least one vendor input comprises an indication of at least one vendor action related to completing the task;

setting a status of the task to indicate a current point in the lifecycle of the task; and

storing data related to the lifecycle of the task in the VC database, including the enterprise inputs and the vendor inputs.